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Peacebuilding Commission
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Guinea-Bissau configuration

Report of the mission of the Peacebuilding Commission to Guinea-Bissau

23-25 January 2008

I. Background

1. At the first meeting of the Guinea-Bissau configuration, on 21 January 2008, the Chairperson of the Guinea-Bissau configuration reiterated her intention to undertake a field visit to Guinea-Bissau. The visit to Guinea-Bissau took place from 23 to 25 January 2008. The Chairperson was accompanied by staff of the Peacebuilding Support Office of the United Nations Secretariat. The main purposes of the exploratory mission were (a) to initiate a dialogue with the Government of Guinea-Bissau with a view to learning about the situation and the priorities for peacebuilding in the country; (b) to discuss with the Government and other stakeholders the country's main peacebuilding issues and challenges; and (c) to explain the processes and purpose of engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission with the country.

2. In the discussions with various stakeholders, the Chairperson explained that the Commission was established to offer support for peacebuilding efforts in countries emerging from conflict. That support consisted of bringing all relevant actors together, marshalling resources for and maintaining sustained international attention on the countries on the agenda of the Commission. A strategic or cooperation framework would be developed as part of the engagement between the Commission and Guinea-Bissau. The Chairperson explained that national ownership was key to both the engagement and the development of the strategic framework. She also conveyed the suggestion to combine medium and long-term strategies with short-term measures that could bring immediate relief for the population.

3. During the visit, the Chairperson had a discussion with the Prime Minister and met the Foreign Minister, the Secretary of State for International Cooperation, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of the Economy, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Defence, the Minister of the Presidency, the Army Chief of Staff, representatives of civil society organizations, members of the

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diplomatic community resident in or accredited to Guinea-Bissau, and the United Nations country team.

4. The report has been organized around the categories of stakeholders with whom the Chairperson interacted. The composition of the delegation is contained in annex I; the programme of the visit is contained in annex II.

II. Government

5. The Government ministers and senior officials who met the Chairperson expressed deep appreciation for the decision of the Commission to place Guinea-Bissau on its agenda. They also welcomed the timeliness of the visit by the Chairperson of the Guinea-Bissau configuration. They conveyed their gratitude to the Government of Brazil for agreeing to chair the Guinea-Bissau configuration. Emphasizing that peacebuilding was essential to post-conflict recovery, growth and development, they expressed the hope that the engagement of the Government of Guinea-Bissau with the Commission would yield significant dividends for the people of Guinea-Bissau. They also noted that Guinea-Bissau had gone through a period of instability which had led to slow economic growth, loss of technical expertise and diminished international confidence in the country. Still, they emphasized that the country had much potential, which was why it needed international support to enable it to launch on a path of political stability, sustained economic growth and development.

6. Achieving political stability was vital to creating an enabling environment for peace and prosperity and restoring international confidence. In that regard, particular emphasis was placed on security sector reform, which was launched on 23 January 2008. The security sector reform programme had three components: (a) reforming the armed forces; (b) strengthening the security forces; and (c) modernizing the justice sector. The Government had developed a strategy document for the restructuring and modernization of the defence and security sector. The document estimated that the Government would require the sum of $184.3 million for the reform of the three components of the sector. Some of the key components of the security sector reform programme included (a) providing infrastructure for the armed forces; (b) modernizing and restructuring the armed forces, in particular equipping them to patrol air space, secure maritime borders and defend the land mass of the country; (c) improving the living conditions in the barracks and police stations; (d) improving the level of training for military and security personnel; (e) building capacity and enhancing efficiency in the justice sector; and (f) preparing a programme for the demobilization of military personnel and adequately compensating demobilized personnel.

7. It was stressed that the impending demobilization should not result in sending away soldiers who had served the country with devotion and distinction, without providing for their future. It was recalled that the security sector reform programme drawn up in 1977 did not provide adequate financial compensation for soldiers during that exercise. That made the demobilized soldiers at that time easy targets of recruitment into the various factions that fought the 1998-1999 civil conflict. The soldiers, who would be demobilized as a consequence of the new security sector reform programme should, therefore, not only be adequately trained for reinsertion into civilian life, but also be given adequate financial resources to start their own

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businesses. For that reason, it was suggested that the security sector reform process be implemented in tandem with initiatives aimed at triggering new economic activities in various sectors.

8. There was much emphasis on the need for public sector reform. That reflected the recognition that the current public administration was weak, impeding the Government's ability to deliver basis social services, manage the economy soundly and promote private-sector development. The main elements of public-sector reform were described as including reducing to 5,000 the size of the public-sector work force, which currently stood at over 20,000; improving public financial management through strict adherence to the minimum fiscal stability programme adopted in May 2007; improving the professional competence of the public sector through training and reforming public finance institutions, such as customs and other revenue-collecting entities; and strengthening the revenue collection system. Government officials noted with satisfaction the positive prospects for cooperation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and requested the assistance of the Commission in supporting its dialogue with relevant international financial institutions, particularly with regard to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt initiative. Regarding revenue generation, it was noted that the inability of the Government to regularly pay the public-sector salaries was due mainly to a weak tax base.

9. The low tax revenue was attributed to the lack of economic growth, which was a consequence of low production in the agricultural and fishery sectors and a stagnant industrial base. The weak performance of those two sectors was in turn attributed mainly to a lack of regular electric power. Therefore, providing a reliable supply of energy would be important for increasing production in the agricultural, industrial and commercial sectors. That was also mentioned in the context of programmes that could bring positive results on a short-term basis. For example, ongoing pilot projects to provide added value to cashew nut exports and produce clean energy from their by-products were welcomed as initiatives that could be further developed.

10. The burden of servicing the country's huge external debt was crippling the Government's ability to invest in public infrastructure. At the same time, in order to stimulate economic growth the Government was committed to creating an enabling business environment. In pursuance of that effort, the Government had undertaken various measures, including creating a sound legal and regulatory framework for business transactions; establishing a "one-stop shop" for reviewing, registering and approving the establishment of business enterprises; reducing the number of days for establishing businesses in the country; requesting technical assistance from partners to help draft new codes of investment for the country; revising the labour and employment laws of the country; and revising legislation to encourage public-private partnerships in the infrastructure sector. It was noted that economic growth was vital to generating wealth, creating employment opportunities, surmounting poverty and establishing the foundation for long-term sustainable peace.

11. Drug-trafficking was repeatedly emphasized as one of the new threats to political stability of the country. In the past few years, Guinea-Bissau had become a major transit point for drug trafficking, at a time when the Government lacked the financial, technical and administrative ability to detect and deter drug traffickers. In order to overcome the new threat, the Government had elaborated a plan and with

the help of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), had converted it to an operational plan. The Government hoped that the pledges made at the Lisbon Conference on Combating Drugs in Guinea-Bissau would help to address the problem of drug trafficking. For its part, the Government remained vigorously committed to fully implementing the plan. It was widely recognized that there was a need to strengthen State institutions, in particular the justice sector, with a view to assuring an effective combat against drug trafficking.

12. One theme that featured prominently and frequently in the course of discussions with Government ministers was the issue of huge deficits in the social sectors. That had several manifestations, including high illiteracy rates among youth and women; high unemployment among youth; poor medical services; lack of technical skills among the youth and low public investment in the health and education sectors. Considerable importance was placed on the need to generate employment opportunities for the youth and to prepare them for taking advantage of the economic opportunities through vocational training that would equip them with the necessary skills. One suggestion in that regard was that the Government should make a special effort to focus on capacity-building for vocational training. At the same time, there should be increased public investment in the health sector so as to increase access to basic health, especially preventive health care. Young people were a positive factor for change and no effort should be spared to enable them to participate actively in the economy and society.

13. The country was currently preparing for Parliamentary elections, tentatively scheduled for October-November 2008. The election was seen as an important element in the promotion of political stability and entrenchment of a democratic culture in the country. Some of the major activities planned in that regard included, voter registration, printing ballot papers and developing biometric identity data. The cost of elections in the 2008-2012 electoral cycle had been estimated at $8.6 million, of which only 7 per cent had been mobilized to date. The Government was mobilizing financial support, with the help of the United Nations system, for the elections.

III. Diplomatic community

14. The Chairperson held a meeting with the diplomatic community, consisting of the resident and accredited missions to Guinea-Bissau and regional organizations, including the Economic Community of West African States and the European Commission.

15. The members of the diplomatic community expressed support for the visit of the Chairperson and indicated that the moment to help Guinea-Bissau was the present time and not later. The involvement and engagement of the Commission with Guinea-Bissau was the most powerful symbol of the international community's commitment to support the country. International support for Guinea-Bissau had to be a joint effort among all members of the international community, including bilateral partners and multilateral institutions. Any assistance to the country, however, should not be burdened with too many conditions since the Government had neither the capacity nor the time to meet such conditions. Support for the country should also combine short-term actions with medium- and long-term

measures; in other words, the engagement of the country of the international community must be sustained.

16. There was recognition that Guinea-Bissau needed assistance on a range of issues but that political stability was essential for sustained and effective peacebuilding. However, frequent policy and personnel changes, as well as weak public administration capacity, had impeded the Government's absorptive capacity. In order for the Government to take full advantage of the support that the international community would provide, it was necessary to strengthen its public administration; deepen the national reconciliation process, which was essential to political stability; and create an environment conducive for private-sector growth.

17. The diplomatic representatives indicated the areas in which their Governments or organizations had provided support to the Government of Guinea-Bissau and would continue to provide assistance, including training doctors, nurses, medical technicians, police and the army; providing microcredit for women's programmes; working on demining action; supporting infant-feeding in schools; strengthening democracy; sanitizing public finance and fighting corruption; working with the military and the police to combat drug-trafficking; strengthening the rule of law; offering humanitarian assistance; building Government premises, primary schools and military barracks; and supporting the Government of Guinea-Bissau in promulgating the amnesty law for soldiers. It was stressed that the promulgation of the amnesty law was one of the factors that had made it possible for armed forces to embrace the security sector reform programme.

18. Given the increasing support being provided to Guinea-Bissau by many bilateral partners and multilateral institutions, the need for improved coordination among all international actors was emphasized. Strengthened coordination among the partners would enable the partners not only to avoid potential friction, while avoiding duplication, but also to offer assistance in a coherent manner enabling each partner to take on projects in areas in which they had particular expertise. To that effect, it suggested that the diplomatic community, including regional and subregional organizations, hold monthly meetings under the auspices of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS).

19. The representatives offered their perspectives on what they believed should be the key issues that the Commission should focus on in its engagement with Guinea-Bissau, including security sector reform; public-sector reform; assistance for the 2008 parliamentary and 2010 presidential elections; energy; combating drug-trafficking; supporting the agriculture, health and education sectors; and capacity-building for vocation training. They also emphasized the need for quick-impact projects as a way of making people feel immediate benefits from the engagement between the Government of Guinea-Bissau and the Commission. They emphasized that if security sector reform and drug-trafficking were not addressed quickly, they would undermine the modicum of stability that currently prevailed in the country. On the other hand, if there was no improvement in the delivery of basic social services, that would weaken public enthusiasm and support for the Government. Consequently, the efforts to make rapid progress in security sector reform must be matched with a corresponding commitment to make discernible improvements in the lives of the people through the provision of a reliable energy supply and the delivery of basic social services.

IV. Civil society organizations

20. The representatives of civil society organizations of Guinea-Bissau, encompassing the private sector, women's organizations, youth organizations, human rights groups and the West African Network for Peacebuilding, welcomed the opportunity to interact with the Chairperson of the Guinea-Bissau Configuration. The Chair also met separately with the Bishop of Bissau.

21. In the discussions, the representatives of civil society organizations emphasized that the problem of political instability in Guinea-Bissau was directly linked to the dismal economic situation in the country. Much attention was devoted to the huge problems in the sectors of education and health. The underlying sources of conflict were also traced to the lack of economic growth and employment opportunities. They explained that there was a link between security sector reform and development, noting that to obtain peace and security there had to be concerted efforts to fight poverty; in order to eradicate poverty there had to be economic growth; and in order to have growth there had to be well functioning and adequate infrastructure, most notably energy, which was essential for increasing production of goods and services.

22. Many factors had constrained growth and employment-generation in the country, including a lack of access to credit by the small-scale and medium-sized enterprises, notably among women; the difficulty that small and medium-sized operators had in getting their projects approved by banks, which increasingly asked for the translation of project documents into French in a Portuguese-speaking country; the lack of technical skills; and the length of time it took to get an enterprise registered and approved. Compounding the problem for the small enterprise operators, who were keen to break into the regional and global export markets, was the lack of marketing skills for exports — particularly of organic products — and the difficulty small business owners had in meeting internationally recognized exports standards. To overcome those problems, there was a need to launch projects devoted to vocational training, processing of local products and strengthening their technical knowledge of export marketing opportunities, as well as considering measures to promote access to microcredit.

23. In spite of the recent progress that had been made in increasing the number of women in the cabinet and legislation promoting gender equality, women continued to be particularly disadvantaged. They lacked economic power which made it difficult for them to run for elections — notably parliamentary elections; they had a high illiteracy rate; and they were disproportionately burdened by poverty. Even for literate and educated women, finding a job remained a difficult endeavour.

24. Significant emphasis was placed on the need to strengthen the rule of law as an integral component of the security sector reform. To date, however, more effort had been devoted to restructuring and modernization of the armed forces, to the neglect of the rule-of-law component. As the next election approached, it was vitally important to strengthen the rule of law in order to entrench democratic practice and tradition in the country. The importance of completing the electoral cycle by holding municipal elections was also highlighted. Two closely related concerns pertained to the need to deal with the problem of small arms and light weapons and drug-trafficking, which had grown in recent times.

25. Civil society organizations were committed to playing their part to strengthen political stability, promote economic dynamism and consolidate peace in the country. As such, civil society organizations were most eager to actively dialogue with the Commission as part of the broader engagement of the Commission with Guinea-Bissau with a view to delivering tangible results for peace. To have civil society actively contribute to the peacebuilding process, they asked for support in building their own implementation capacity. Civil society organizations, therefore, recommended that the Commission adopt an inclusive approach in articulating a peacebuilding framework or equivalent instrument in Guinea-Bissau.

V. The United Nations country team

26. The United Nations country team expressed satisfaction at the decision of the Commission to engage with Guinea-Bissau, which after several years of post-conflict situation is still marred by a number of structural problems, such as weak public administration capacity, resulting in the inability to deliver basic social services and inadequate financial re ›urces to pay for such services. The team observed that another major structural challenge was the lack of economic growth and fiscal revenue.

27. The lack of economic growth had led to a decline of employment opportunities, especially among the youth. At the same time, since only a mere 30 per cent of young people between the ages of 8 and 13 currently attended school, an even smaller percentage would attend secondary school. That has produced a vicious circle, in which the youth that should be preparing to enter the economy in the future would be less and less equipped with the skills to do so, while the current lack of growth removed the opportunities for those that had skills to participate. The growing youth unemployment in the country would potentially have destabilizing consequences. There was a strong belief that the country needed to pay special attention to the social sectors, in particular education and health. The country team took the view that while security sector reform might be important for political stability in the country, the social sectors merited special attention if the country was to be launched on the path of long-term growth and development.

28. An important element in promoting economic recovery and growth was the building of Government capacity in a range of sectors. One approach could be to strengthen such capacities by providing targeted training for specific functions. Such efforts should focus on strengthening the capacity of Government departments to articulate policies, formulate plans and implement relevant programmes that would enable the people to see and feel the benefits of peace. Special emphasis was placed on the need to deliver on what was described as "early peace dividends" projects, which should, however, be linked to ongoing development programmes. Developing projects for early peace dividends should benefit from the views of both the Government and civil society; in other words, engagement with civil society, who mostly operated at the grass-roots level, deserved the same attention as dialogue with Government leaders. As an illustration, one such project could contemplate the health sector; the lack of electricity in Bissau's hospital had been causing severe difficulties, sometimes with fatal consequences. Quick-impact projects, such as provision of a generator that required relatively modest resources, could be implemented to yield an immediate impact on the living conditions of the population.

29. It was also recognized that foreign direct investment was necessary in order to promote the diversification of the economy. That, in turn, would require the Government to regain the confidence of international partners, some of whom had expressed frustration in the past.

VI. Concluding observations

30. The engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission was being viewed as a turning point in the evolution of the political and economic transition in Guinea-Bissau and of the engagement of the international community with the country. The timing of the visit was most auspicious. It had come after the finalization of the country action programme by the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and United Nations Population Fund for the implementation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2008-2012. It also coincided with the launching of the security sector reform programme in Parliament on 23 January 2008, the date the mission began. On 28 January 2008, the IMF Executive Board considered and approved emergency post-conflict assistance to Guinea-Bissau.

31. The visit had allowed the Chairperson to gain insights into, and perspectives on, the challenges confronting the country, including key issues in its peacebuilding efforts. The remainder of the present section focuses on three themes: (a) signs of hope and concerns; (b) expectations from the Government about the engagement of the Commission; and (c) key issues in peacebuilding.

32. There are many signs of hope in Guinea-Bissau that provide a solid platform for increasing international support for the country and for the engagement of the Commission with the Government, including the prevailing atmosphere of political stability; the commitment of the Government to security sector reform; the determination to reform the public sector; and the recognition that efforts have to be made to address the huge deficits in the social sector. Nonetheless, there are concerns about the capacity to effectively combat drug-trafficking, which is viewed as a new threat to political stability, and the capacity of the public sector to help the Government engage productively with the international community.

33. The discussion with Government leaders and senior officials revealed that they had very high expectations about the engagement with the Commission. In particular, the Government was keen for support in the areas that it highlighted as key issues in the country's peacebuilding efforts. The Government was looking forward to the engagement with the Commission as a catalyst for both increased international support and sustained international attention to meet the developmental needs of the country.

34. The interaction with various stakeholders, in particular with the Government, had highlighted a number of key issues for peacebuilding in the country, including security sector reform; public-sector reform, including sound fiscal management and paying public-sector wages; combating drug-trafficking; providing energy to help increase production in the various sectors of the economy; assistance for the forthcoming elections; capacity-building for vocational training of youth; and incentives for the reactivation of the economy. Ideally, those elements could be tackled in a combined and integrated manner, in close consultation with the

Government, which would ultimately define priorities and steer the work of the Commission.

35. A long-term strategy could be combined with a short-term approach through the identification of projects that could have an immediate impact on the living conditions of the people. Such projects could be conceived as a means of promoting economic activities, such as in the cashew nut sector; fostering political stability through, inter alia, contributions to the electoral process; providing further contributions to the fight against drug-trafficking and law-enforcement measures; and ameliorating the educational system in the country.

36. The Chairperson expressed appreciation to the Government of Guinea-Bissau and the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau and the United Nations country team for their support and assistance during the visit.

Annex I

Composition of the delegation

Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations and Chairperson of the Peacebuilding Commission Guinea-Bissau configuration

Alexandre Mendes Nina, First Secretary, Brazil

Ejeviome Eloho Otobo, Director Strategic Planning and Deputy Head, Peacebuilding Support Office of the United Nations Secretariat

Philip Helminger, Political Affairs Officer, Strategic Planning, Peacebuilding Support Office of the United Nations Secretariat

Annex II

Programme

Wednesday, 23 January

1205	Arrival in Bissau of Maria Luiza R. Viotti and Alexandre Mendes Nina
1215-1230	Meeting with Maria da Conceição Nobre Cabral, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Guinea-Bissau
1430-1600	Meeting with Shola Omoregie, Representative of the Secretary-General in Guinea-Bissau, and Giuseppina Mazza, UNDP Resident Representative in Guinea-Bissau
1630-1730	Meeting with United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau and United Nations country team

Thursday, 24 January

0940-1030	Meeting with Roberto Ferreira Cachéu, Secretary of State for International Cooperation
1030-1130	Meeting with Certório Biote, Minister of the Interior
1145-1230	Meeting with Issufo Sanha, Minister of Finance
1245-1330	Meeting with Marciano Barbeiro, Minister of Defence
1330-1530	Civil society
1415-1430	Martinho Dafa Cabi,[a] Prime Minister
1620-1700	Meeting with Tagba Na Waie, Army Chief of Staff

Friday, 25 January

0915-1000	Meeting with Bishop Bissign of Guinea-Bissau
1010-1100	Meeting with Carmelita Pires, Minister of Justice
1100-1200	Meeting with Aboubacar Dahaba, Minister of Economy
1300-1500	Meeting with diplomatic missions
1515-1530	Meeting with Pedro da Costa, Minister of the Presidency
1625	Departure of Ms. Viotti and Mr. Mendes Nina

[a] Telephone conversation.